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Inside Washington

Our Steady Retreat From Internal Security

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A decade ago, the U.S. began to dismantle its apparatus for the maintenance of internal security as a result of pressure from liberals in the Congress and from organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union.

The Baltimore Police Department destroyed all of its intelligence files on radical groups in 1973. The Texas Department of Public Safety destroyed all intelligence files developed from "non-criminal" investigations. The mayor of Los Angeles, Thomas Bradley, announced a move "for positive social change"—the destruction of almost two million entry items in their intelligence files in 1973. New York's police commissioner announced that 80 per cent of the intelligence unit's files relating to "police security" matters had been purged from police records.

The FBI, beginning with Atty. Gen. Edward Levi's stewardship, also slashed its own efforts at investigating potentially dangerous and subversive groups. In Senate testimony, then-FBI Director Clarence Kelley revealed that under the new Justice Department guidelines, the FBI had to cut domestic surveillance by 97 per cent. At the same time, both the House and Senate voted to eliminate their internal security committees.

Discussing these trends at that time, Sen. Strom Thurmond (R.-S.C.) declared: "In some of our major cities, 90 per cent or more of the intelligence files have been purged to make them accord with new and highly restrictive standards. Under these standards, membership in organizations like the Communist party, the Trotskyist party and the Maoist movement does not qualify a person for entry...."

It is in this context that we should look at the recent dramatic increase in Soviet-bloc espionage in the U.S. and the growing evidence that we have neglected to properly protect the nation's classified defense material.

On May 19, ex-submariner John A. Walker Jr. was arrested after dropping secret U.S. Navy documents at a site in the Maryland countryside outside Washington. Shortly thereafter, his 22-year-old son, Michael Walker, a crewman on the U.S. aircraft carrier *Nimitz*, was arrested, as was his brother Arthur J. Walker, a Navy veteran

and onetime anti-submarine-warfare specialist.

With backgrounds in what may be the most sensitive of all naval areas—the undersea nuclear forces—the Walkers may have been in a position to pass on details about America's undersea deterrent. The deepest concern is that the Walkers may have given the Russians important information on how to improve their own fleet of missile submarines. Both were in a position to provide clues to how the U.S. locates and listens to Soviet subs and on techniques the U.S. uses to make its own subs operate silently.

The Walkers, who may have been involved in espionage for 20 years, were not captured as a result of careful FBI intelligence work. Quite to the contrary. Until John Walker's former wife went to an FBI office in Massachusetts with information about his espionage activities, the U.S. government had no idea of what was going on.

Unfortunately, the Walker case appears to be only the tip of a much larger iceberg. In the last 12 months alone, espionage charges have been brought in eight separate cases, implicating 15 people—including, for the first time, an active agent of the FBI. The offenses allegedly range from theft of coding devices to offers to sell the Soviet Union information about America's crucial radar-evading Stealth technology.

FBI figures show that in the last four years, 11 other people have been charged with espionage and convicted. By way of contrast, there were 46 people convicted of espionage or related crimes over the previous 40 years. These, of course, are only the ones who have been caught.

The number of Americans approved to handle material classified as secret or top secret has risen beyond four million. In fact, so many people are now asking for official clearance to handle "secret" and "top secret" materials, government officials say, that it is impossible to investigate the applications adequately. More than 200,000 people applied for clearance to handle classified information last year, 50 per cent more than a decade ago. Federal officials say that one reason for the growth in such requests is that the number of classified documents and related materials has grown dramatically in the last few years.

But if classified material and those able to handle it have increased, our internal security capability has not.

In the Walker family case, the men involved had all been cleared by the Navy for access to classified

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materials. The Defense Department, which handles 90 per cent of the government's security clearances, is supposed to re-investigate everyone cleared for access to top-secret material every five years. But the department says that it is so overwhelmed with new applications that the re-investigations are being conducted only once every 17 years, on average.

Sen. Patrick J. Leahy (D.-Vt.), vice chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, states: "I'm not impressed with the steps that have been taken to deal with the increase in applications."

In recent congressional testimony, Bill W. Thurman, the General Accounting Office's deputy director for national security affairs, said the government's security clearance program suffered from inconsistent and erratic investigative procedures, a lack of periodic re-investigations of most cleared personnel and failure to control the increasing number of clearance requests.

Thurman criticized the Navy, in particular, for failing to heed numerous recommendations from his and other agencies that it assign one office the job of deciding who should be cleared. Now the decisions are made by different people among the Navy's 3,000 commands around the world.

The Defense Department has about 1,400 investigators to process the 206,790 applications for security clearance it received last year. One Department official said: "With all these applications, we now seem to be in the business of clearing people, not of finding potential security risks." Sen. Sam Nunn (D.-Ga.), the senior Democrat on the Permanent Investigations subcommittee, says: "Numbers are overwhelming the whole system." A Senate aide involved with investigations of clearance procedures said: "We're finding that in many of the recent espionage cases there are indicators that they would have been caught with a re-investigation."

If there was ever a time to beef up our capacity to protect the nation's internal security, that time is now. If anyone needed further evidence for such restoration of our internal security capability, the walker case now provides it.